

UNDER A DARKENING SKY

letters, still only in part collected, extend from the forties to the nineties of the century. Giovanni had become a monk of the Vallombrosan rule at an early age, and, while superior of S. Trinita in Florence, had committed a peculiarly scandalous and infamous crime, for which (after release from imprisonment) he did penance all the rest of his long life. In his earliest extant letter, he beseeches the saintly Augustinian hermit, Fra Simone da Cascia, as a most experienced physician of souls, to heal "the execrable wound of my mind": "I was what I am not; I used to do penance; but now, by looking back, I have become a statue of salt. I used to taste what now, in my wretchedness, I hardly remember. I have fallen, and cannot rise of myself; I strive to return to the man I was, but dare not, for my mind is overwhelmed by remorse and confounded by the shame of my sins. Receive me, then, crying to thee from the abyss, and begin to build up in me what I have destroyed."¹ After this he took the name of Giovanni dalle Celle, "John of the Cells," from the solitude above Vallombrosa to which he retired, but from which he issued at intervals to labour in Florence and elsewhere for the good of souls. Men and women alike appealed to him for direction; but his special work of this kind seems to have been the guidance of a confraternity of young men, known as his adopted sons, whom he trained in the religious life; at the same time, through his friend Guido dal Palagio (a man of devout life and great charity, known to students of Italian literature by a noble patriotic canzone, and dear to lovers of the beautiful for the Franciscan convent above Fiesole which he founded), he kept in touch with the government of the Republic.

It has frequently been stated that Catherine had come to Pisa by the express wish of the Pope, to carry out certain negotiations

¹ This letter, with Fra Simone's answer, is given by P. Nicola Mattioli, // *Beato Simone Fidati da Cascia* (Rome, 1898), pp. 392-410, and must have been written before 1348, the year of Simone's death. Giovanni's crime, as described by Girolamo of Vallombrosa, in B. Sorio, *Lettere del B. Giovanni dalle Celle*, p. 7, curiously illustrates Catherine's words about the wicked practices of certain monks, in her *Dialogo*, cap. 129.